

### Geopolitical developments in South East Europe: the political-geographical rearrangement of South East Europe

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# Geopolitical developments in South East Europe

## The political-geographical rearrangement of South East Europe

PETER JORDAN

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### *Zusammenfassung*

#### **Geopolitische Entwicklungen in Südosteuropa**

Die politisch-geographische Neuordnung Südosteuropas

Der Beitrag widmet sich den wesentlichen Schritten der politisch-geographischen Neuordnung in Südosteuropa nach der politischen Wende des Jahres 1989. Dabei werden unter Südosteuropa im kulturell-räumlichen Sinn die byzantinisch geprägten und osmanisch nachhaltig überprägten Gebiete südlich von Donau und Save einschließlich Bosniens und der Herzegowina verstanden. Die Überlegungen beziehen aber auch Slowenien und Kroatien als Nachfolgestaaten Jugoslawiens sowie Rumänien mit ein. Als Ausgangspunkte pfadabhängiger Transformationsprozesse werden die Spielarten des Kommunismus in dieser Region eingehend diskutiert. Das Wiederaufleben der nationalen Frage schon in der Endphase des Kommunismus war entscheidend für den Zerfall Jugoslawiens, aber auch für die Entwicklung der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Situation in den anderen Staaten. Die internationale Staatengemeinschaft reagierte auf die gewaltsamen Konflikte beim Zerfall Jugoslawiens mit einer Eindämmungsstrategie, die sich auch in einem Heranführen Südosteuropas an die europäischen Strukturen äußerte. Immer noch bestehen aber mit dem Kosovo, Makedonien und Bosnien-Herzegowina akute und latente Konfliktherde. Nationale Antagonismen erschweren es Südosteuropa, seiner Stellung als europäische Peripherie zu entkommen und an Eigengewicht zu gewinnen. Seine traditionelle Brückenfunktion zwischen Europa und Vorderasien nimmt es aber wieder ein, wozu seine altansässigen muslimischen Bevölkerungsgruppen einen wichtigen Beitrag leisten.

*Südosteuropa, Geopolitik, Kommunismus, Nationalismus, Transformation, EU-Erweiterung, Muslime*

### **Abstract**

This article is dedicated to the essential phases in the political/geographic restructuring of South East Europe after the political changes in 1989. South East Europe is understood in terms of cultural regions such as those sustainably formed by the Byzantine and Ottoman cultures south of the Danube and Save Rivers including Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our deliberations will also include Slovenia and Croatia as the follow-up states of Yugoslavia and Romania. The different types of communism in this region will be discussed in detail as the point of departure of path-dependent transformation processes. The resurgence of the national issue in the final phases of communism was the key factor for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but also for the emergence of the political and social situation in the other states. The international community of states reacted to the violent conflicts during the disintegration of Yugoslavia with a containment strategy that expressed itself by bringing South East Europe closer to European structures. However, there are still acute and latent flashpoints in the form of Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. National antagonisms make it difficult for South East Europe to escape its position as the European periphery and to gain its own stature. However, it is beginning to regain its traditional function as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East to which its old Muslim population groups make an important contribution.

*South East Europe, geopolitics, communism, nationalism, transformation, extension of the European Union, Muslims*

### **Introduction**

This article shall illuminate important geopolitical developments and changes in South East Europe since 1989, because they are of great importance for the Mediterranean region. Some of South East Europe can even be considered part of the Mediterranean region; in any case, it is bound by common historical influences (particularly the Roman Empire, Eastern Rome, Byzantium, Ottoman Empire), as well as traditional and current economic and migration relationships. Since the political changes of 1989, it has proven to be both the most dangerous European crisis region, and also one of the main

sources of refugee and migration flows. Mediterranean countries like Italy and Greece have been substantially affected by it. Parts of the Mediterranean region also connect South East Europe with old, established Muslim population groups – vestiges of the Ottoman Empire.

In a cultural-geographical sense, South East Europe can be understood as consisting of those European countries, which in addition to the cultural influences of Byzantium, have also been significantly reshaped by the Ottoman Empire (as consequence of its particularly protracted and direct rule there). This characterization is certainly true for the

region south of the Danube and Sava, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. The other successor states of Yugoslavia (Slovenia and Croatia), as well as Romania are included in this article because they are closely connected to the developments mentioned.

The impetus for the political-geographical realignment of South East Europe was the collapse of communism. The contrast between the self-governing system of Yugoslavia and the planned economies of the other communist states meant that the collapse manifested itself in different ways than in the rest of communist Europe. The individual states of

South East Europe also stood in very different relations to the community of communist states and played different roles on the international political stage. It is important to note these differences in order to understand the difference in the transformation processes that followed.

The resurgence of the national question, which had already begun in the final phase of communism, is of crucial importance not only in the collapse of Yugoslavia. Then, as now, it sets the political and social climate to a great extent also in the other countries in the region and therefore deserves appropriate attention.

Serbia's attempt to retain dominance over the greater part of the former Yugoslavia is identified as one of the factors triggered the violent conflicts in former Yugoslavia. The international community reacted to this conflict with a strategy of confinement which changed the political landscape of South East Europe considerably and initiated the integration of this large region into the European structures. Both of these results are objects of a detailed analysis.

Finally, remaining hurdles in the conflict are discussed and an attempt is made to assess future roles of South East Europe in Europe as a whole, with a particular focus on the position of Muslim groups in South East Europe.

## **Geopolitical changes since 1989**

### ***The collapse of communism***

With the exception of Greece and Cyprus, communist parties seized power after the Second World War in all of the states of South East Europe. They came into power in different ways, not all could rely on mass support. They practised different political and economic systems, and were incorporated in different ways into the communist world. The former communist states thus offered different jumping-off points for political and economic transformation after the collapse of communism.

In Yugoslavia and Albania, the communist movement had a broad basis in Tito's and Enver Hoxha's partisan movements, in contrast to the rest of communist South East Europe. Both partisan movements had developed during the resistance against German and Italian occupying forces. They were thus liberation movements that were rooted in broad sections of the population, if not

unrivalled, and were supported by the western allies. Liberation and communist seizure of power occurred differently than in most other communist states without considerable support from the Soviet Union and its Red Army which afforded them a great deal of political leeway with respect to Moscow and greater self-assuredness in their own activities.

While Tito's and Hoxha's partisan movements initially cooperated and even discussed joining Albania to Yugoslavia, a rift occurred between Tito and Hoxha following Tito's break with Stalin and the withdrawal of communist Yugoslavia from the Communist Information Bureau (1948); Hoxha remained true to Moscow and continued on a Stalinist course. Tito's Yugoslavia in contrast did not become a member of the Warsaw Pact of 1955, but became co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, and at the same time with its "self-management socialism" struck out on its own socialist path, which soon would differentiate it from all other communist states.

Communist Yugoslavia had no centrally controlled planned economy, but rather had a self-management system that regulated business and the "public sector" [društveni sektor]. Self-managing companies acted autonomously, set their own business goals and procedures, were not in state ownership but, formally at least, were employee owned. Along with the "public sector" there was a private sector of the economy, however it was legally limited and primarily served a supplementary function. Private farmers could own up to 10 ha land. Because the collectivisation of agriculture had been discontinued in the late 1940s, they farmed nearly 70 % of all agricultural land until the late 1980s (TASCHLER 1989). Private service sector businesses were permitted to operate, but without hired service personnel (as family businesses), but played a significant role – in coastal tourism for instance.

This dual system gave Yugoslavia a veneer of "human socialism". In contrast to the planned economies, sufficient consumer goods were available, there was freedom to travel, itinerant workers were permitted to seek employment in the West (after 1963), and there was unhindered tourism allowed from Western countries. Still, the communist party (officially, the Communist League) still exercised political control in Yugoslavia – personified to a great degree in the char-

ismatic leader Tito – over the economy through a politically-controlled system of loan issuance, and over political views through reprimand and prosecution.

In contrast, the other communist states of South East Europe had actual planned economies with centrally designed business plans that set production goals, allocated roles and set objectives for individual sectors and regions. Agriculture was collective with the exception of mountain areas and small personal farms and organized into large government operations, or into collective farms (depending on the country). All services (financial, trade, traffic, tourism) were operated by the state or associations. They were neglected (in stark contrast to Yugoslavia), which caused undersupply. Also in contrast to Yugoslavia, the other communist states diverted shipping of commercial goods to the railway. Road traffic was in every respect something of an anomaly, which meant that the road network was significantly less developed than in Yugoslavia.

Economic transformation in Yugoslavia therefore started with a much different set of conditions than other communist states: predominantly non-collective, small farm based private agriculture, making privatization of agriculture with all the associated upheaval almost unnecessary; a relatively well-developed retail trade system; tourism infrastructure that was nearly suited to the market; and a road network that was well-developed even in rural areas.

We should not overlook that the relatively liberal system and higher standard of living likely imparted Yugoslavian citizens with a certain feeling of superiority over their communist neighbors. This has had a lasting effect to this day, such that Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, for instance, hardly give a thought to uniting with Albania.

In the political-administrative arena, the Yugoslavian principle of self-managed socialism led, in contrast to the other centrally organized communist states of South East Europe, to the development of a federal system with six constituent republics and two autonomous provinces (within the constituent republic of Serbia) which were defined along national/ethnic lines and on the local level were set up in self-governing communes. The 1974 constitution strengthened political-administrative self-government and gave the republics and autonomous provinces

the status of significant political actors alongside the federal administration. Their political clout increased following the death of President Tito in 1980 and representatives of the republics and autonomous provinces occupied the Central Committee with a chairmanship that rotated annually.

The great independence and power of the republics and autonomous provinces, in any case since 1974 (ROGGEMANN 1980), not only helped develop their own political and administrative structures, but also helped develop such structures in all other areas. The individual republics also developed their own raw materials industries, energy supply systems and harbor locations. The development of quasi sovereign state structures also applied to republics and autonomous provinces which, like Slovenia, Macedonia, and Kosovo had not been political units prior to communist Yugoslavia; or like Croatia, which had previously existed within other borders. In the case of these states at least, state independence would hardly have been possible without the federal Yugoslav phase.

### ***The resurgence of the national question***

As an internationalist ideology, communism attached only secondary significance to the national question. But it was the communist states of South East Europe which developed forms of communism with nationalist undertones in the sense of communist national states following the Stalin period. This was particularly evident under Nicolai Ceausescu in Romania beginning in the late 1960s, and to a lesser extent also in Bulgaria and Albania. The victims of these forms of communism, which saw the state at the possession of the state nation, were the Hungarian minority in Romania; in Bulgaria, the Turks who were pressured up until the final phase of communist dominance (1984/85) and tried to emigrate in large numbers to Turkey. The relatively large group of Greeks in Albania formed the main national opponents of an Albanian nationalist communism.

Yugoslavia, which was *de facto* a multinational state, but which in the interwar period understood itself also as nation state – namely, of the Yugoslavian nation consisting of the Serbian, Croat and Slovene peoples – also went its own way in this regard. In a conscious break with the Yugoslavia of the interwar peri-



Fig. 1: Regions which Serbia could see as “Serbian” after the Second World War  
Source: own design

od which was under the hegemony of the Serbs, Tito’s Yugoslavia sought a balance between the southern Slavic nations. The non-Slavic Albanians however, were not accorded an equal role.

Achieving this balance involved more than just establishing a federal system. Under the pressure of Tito’s partisan movement which had also achieved victory over the Serbian nationalist Chetniks, the Serbs were stripped of their territorial claims (see Fig. 1): (1) Regions referred to in Serbia as southern Serbia were upgraded to the Republic of Macedonia, its majority population was provided with all the trappings of a separate Orthodox nation (standard language, autocephalous Orthodox church); (2) Serbia was prevented from direct interference with sections of Serbia that contained large national/ethnic minorities (Kosovo, Vojvodina) because they were autonomous; (3) Bosnia-Hercegovina, whose population up to the 1961 census was predominantly Serbian (THE MIROSLAV KRLEŽA LEXICOGRAPHICAL INSTITUTE 1993, p. 123), was granted the status of a republic with no special rights for the Serbs; (4) Montenegro, which had been an independent state prior to the forma-

tion of Yugoslavia, but which had integrated itself without reservation into Yugoslavia and whose majority understood itself nationally as Serbs, was also established as an independent republic with “Montenegrins” as the titular nation; (5) 12 compact communes in Croatia bordering each other with Serbian majorities received no special status.

All these measures were tolerated by the Serbs. Flare-ups of Serbian nationalism (such as occurred in the first half of the 1960s when the Serb Aleksander Ranković was the General Secretary of the Communist League) were suppressed under Tito’s authority. Nationalist demonstrations by Croats and Slovenes, which were grounded in the feeling that they were disadvantaged within Yugoslavia’s disparity equalization system, for which they as the most economically capable always ended up footing the bill, were likewise held back by Tito.

What was lacking to go along with the suppression of national claims and nationalist upsurges through the power of the communist dictatorship and despite relatively favorable economic conditions, was grappling with the history of the severe conflicts between the Yugoslavian



nations (and also with Albanians), especially during the Second World War. They had caused severe mutual injury and continued to fester on as unresolved potential conflicts.

Once the economic situation began to deteriorate in 1980 (bottlenecks with fuel and consumer goods supply at the beginning of the 1980s), following the death of the unanimously popular Tito, the national consciousness of all of these resurfaced. This is also reflected statistically in the decrease in numbers of those who thought of themselves as supranational, in a purely civic sense as “Yugoslavi-ans” – that is, who no longer considered their national/ethnic affiliation essential. Between the all-Yugoslav census of 1981 and that of 1991, this group dropped from 5.4 % to 3.0 % of the population (SAVEZNI ZAVOD ZA STATISTIKU 1981; SAVEZNI ZAVOD ZA STATISTIKU 1993).

The resurgence of a national consciousness meant for Serbs that they strengthened their claim to primacy in the whole state and intended to restrict the far-reaching self-government of the autonomous Serbian provinces, especially Kosovo. Early in the 1980s, the idea of Greater Serbia was reawakened in the background, which considered all of the Orthodox southern Slavs except for Bulgarians, and all those who spoke the Štokavian dialect to be Serbs, and which held the belief, along the lines of the 1844 published “schemes” of Načertanje, that the Serbian people would only be capable of successful national development once they succeeded in dominating the rest of the southern Slavs. An important representative of the Greater Serbia idea was the Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić (1865-1927), to whom the Serbian nationalists often made reference.

Among Croats and Slovenes the resurgence of a national consciousness strengthened the conviction that they did not have to share the fruits of their economic achievements with others. They also strove to live out their national cultures even more in their respective republics.

As the majority in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Bosniaks (at the time called “ethnic Muslims”) strove for political dominance in this republic. The Kosovar Albanians demanded the status of a republic in Kosovo. The ethnic Macedonians increasingly viewed its minority-rich republic as its own nation state. Only

Montenegro continued to cooperate closely with Serbia.

With these divergent aims, so at odds with one another, the resurgence of the national question became the driving force behind the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Nationalism and nationalist thinking culminated during the wars following Yugoslavia’s collapse, but are still common in the whole of South East Europe today and more deeply rooted than in many other parts of Europe. It is associated with the “youth” of these nations, who first sought to free themselves from the dominance of the superpowers and then to emancipate themselves from nationally different elites. It is associated with the Orthodox churches who, unlike the universal Roman Catholic Church, understand themselves to be national churches and after the fall of communism regained influence in society. It is also very much associated with the inversion of the political position between these nations, who as Muslim converts backed the authority of the Ottoman Empire, and those other nations, who as Christians were discriminated against at that time and later represented the state nations. The latter accuse the former of betraying the common cause out of opportunism – an accusation that weighs heavily considering the keen historical consciousness in South East Europe. This, in fact, was the backdrop to some extent of all the virulent conflicts in the region today between Serbs and Albanians, Bosniaks and Serbs/Croats, Macedonians and Albanians.

The strong national consciousness, based on very different historical views and often antagonistic, makes the relationships between neighboring countries, as well as political and economic cooperation in the region difficult. Most of these states have oriented themselves, if at all, to an external reference point (Brussels, USA) rather than trying to seek an intra-regional relationship. That makes it more difficult for South East Europe to overcome the status of the European periphery and to gain influence.

### ***The collapse of Yugoslavia***

While the collapse of Yugoslavia may well have been triggered by the resurgence of national consciousness with all of the peoples involved, and especially by the reemergence of the idea of Greater Serbia, and was only made possible by the end of the political rift in Europe, it

had underlying causes that ran deeper, and were just waiting to be set off.

By far the most important was the cultural rift within the country. Central European and Venetian-influenced Slovenes and Croats were juxtaposed against Byzantine and Ottoman-influenced Serbs, Bosniaks, Macedonians, and Albanians (Montenegri-ns belonged to both categories). Competition oriented, urbanized, enlightened, to some extent early industrialized societies came up against cultures for whom close ties between church and state/nation, rigid hierarchies and centralism were the rule and which persisted for a very long time in a feudal agrarian state.

Consequently, a second important reason for collapse can be attributed to a steep northwest-southeast rift in the average educational level, in economic performance, and in the standard of living within Yugoslavia (see BERTIĆ 1987; MALASCHOFSKY & KLEIN 1972). Despite intensive inter-Yugoslavian efforts to equalize the disparity it could not be reduced, but only continued to grow (KIEFER 1979). Due to this, the number of inter-Yugoslavian immigrants increased in the relatively well to do republics of Slovenia and Croatia in the 1980s. These republics viewed the growing number of immigrants as a burden and quickly tired of bankrolling the failed immigrants.

As a third reason it should be pointed out that even the Yugoslavia of the interwar period could scarcely have come about in the form it did without external pressure, and that Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia followed different state goals from the beginning. Also, communist Yugoslavia emerged in a macro-political situation that would not have allowed another alternative. It was not until this situation changed that collapse was possible.

A fourth reason was the highly sophisticated and far reaching (since 1974 at least) political self-administration. It allowed for largely autonomous political units, for whom independence was a small step.

The collapse of Yugoslavia (so far<sup>1</sup>) took place exactly along the inter-Yugoslavian borders, although some of these are very recent and many are derived from the post WWII period. They are also

<sup>1</sup> Further collapse, e.g. as a result of divisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina or of Kosovo or Macedonia, cannot be ruled out.

undisputed with a few exceptions (the sea border between Slovenia and Croatia in the bay of Piran [Piranski zaliv/Piranski zaljev], the Serbian majority communes Kosovska Mitrovica/Mitrovicë and Leposavić/Leposaviq on the border of Serbia and Kosovo, Albanian majority communes Medveđa, Bujanovac, Preševo on the border of Serbia and Kosovo).

The collapse of the relatively large Yugoslavia (1991: 256,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 23 million inhabitants) into several small and medium-sized states has fundamentally changed the geopolitical situation in the Adriatic region. The power of Italy on the western Adriatic coast now has no near equivalent on the eastern coast and thus has become the dominant in the Adriatic region politically and economically.

The Adriatic is also no longer a border between political and economic systems or military blocks.

With time, this could lead to a reemergence of the former Adriatic cultural unit as it existed from Roman times until the Second World War.

### ***Serbia's attempt to maintain dominance over large parts of the former Yugoslavia***

Against the backdrop of a resurgence of the idea Greater Serbia, expressed in a memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences in 1984<sup>2</sup>, the political representatives of Serbia gave clear signals beginning in the late 1980s that they wanted to solve the problem of Yugoslavia through tightened leadership in Belgrade and in favor of Serbia. In a speech in 1987 Slobodan Milošević, chairman of the Serbian communists, sided with Serbs in Kosovo, who in his view were being persecuted. During commemoration of the slaughter of Kosovo polje in 1989, Milošević announced plans for energetic action against Albanians in Kosovo. In 1990, Serbia suspended the autonomous rights of both of its autonomous provinces Kosovo and Vojvodina so that the Yugoslavian state committee, in which the six representatives of the republics and the two representatives of the autonomous provinces had the same voting rights, could no longer vote against Serbian interests.<sup>3</sup>

This triggered ambitions for independence in Slovenia and Croatia. But the looming collapse of Yugoslavia was judged quite differently by the international community. Thus, there were forces within the European Community (later the European Union) which gave Belgrade assurances that they would absolutely support the unity of Yugoslavia.

The federal army, which had been instrumentalized for Serbian interests, was first active in the June 1991 "Ten Day War" in order to prevent Slovenia breaking away. This attempted intervention was half-hearted and failed quickly. With substantially greater pressure, the federal army was engaged in 1992 in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to keep the large Serbian minority there in a common state. Belgrade also supported these minorities directly and encouraged them to form separate states. That led to violent conflicts that involved great loss of life in both republics, and did not end until August 2005 in Croatia with the dissolution of the Serbian separatist state and the mass exodus of a majority of the Serbs as well as until December 2005 in Bosnia-Herzegovina through US military intervention and the Dayton Agreement.

Serbia removed the Albanians from all administrative functions in Kosovo, whose autonomy rights had been suspended in 1990. The Albanians then set up a shadow state, initially behaving mostly peacefully until the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina had ended in hopes of gaining international support. Since the support was not forthcoming, even after 1995, they formed radical groups and militant fractions among themselves, which caused corresponding Serbian reactions. The violent conflicts escalated and reached a peak in 1999 in the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Albanians, especially into the neighboring countries of Albania and Macedonia but also into Montenegro, which since 1998 had ceased supporting the Serbian course and gladly accepted the Albanian refugees. Due to this human catastrophe and also because of the threat of destabilization spreading to other regions, NATO launched air strikes on Serbian cities, forcing the Serbs to relent.

With the removal of Milošević as the leader of Serbia in 2000, Serbia's attempt to retain dominance over greater parts of the former Yugoslavia came to an end.

These attempts and their failure had far-reaching consequences especially for the Serbs themselves, but also for the whole region. The former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it still consisted of Serbia and Montenegro) was placed under an economic blockade by the United Nations from 1992 to 1995. That damaged the Serbian economy and prevented the beginning of a transformation process. The transportation blockade of Yugoslavia diverted the West and Central Europe - South East Europe/Middle East route to the east, (through Romania and Bulgaria) and via shipping (between the ports on the northern Italian Adriatic and Greece) (JORDAN 2006). Because of the international discrediting of Milošević's regime, the lack of security which lasted at least until the Kosovo ethnic cleansing crisis, and the instability of the internal political situation, the transformation process could scarcely take hold between 1995 and 2000 and Serbia was set back ten years. The diverted international transportation as a result of the crisis years returned only partially to the Serbian routes after 2000.

Many of these consequences also affected other countries in the region, albeit to a lesser extent. Macedonia was particularly affected and suffered nearly as severely as Serbia under the United Nations economic and transportation blockade. Montenegro was also particularly affected as a republic of the Yugoslavian Federation which existed until 2003 and afterwards was converted to a loose union. This co-suffering was one of the essential reasons for the distancing of Montenegro from Serbia beginning in 1998 under the leadership of Milo Đukanović. Its main industry, tourism, lay dormant a decade long and only started to revive in the early 2000s. Even Croatian tourism was hit hard and did not bounce back until the end of the 1990s, whereby the year of the Kosovo crisis (1999) was a further setback. Because of their close trade relationships with Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania also suffered greatly from the UN-blockade.

Serbia not only completely failed in its attempt to retain dominance over large parts of the former Yugoslavia, it also lost something which it otherwise would not have: Montenegro. It had always been a staunch ally to Serbia and had itself actively participated in 1992 in the offensives of the federal army and Serbia (e.g. at the attack of Croatian Du-

<sup>2</sup> see Milosavljević 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The representatives of Serbia and Montenegro, and now also those of Vojvodina and Kosovo, always voted in the interest of the Serbs.

brovnik) but increasingly distanced itself after 1998 and broke completely from its confederation with Serbia in 2006. Serbia had probably already lost Kosovo *de facto* through the events of 1990 (stripping the Albanian administration of power in the autonomous province). The expulsions in 1999 definitely ruled out any possibility of a peaceful and democratic re-integration of Kosovo into the Serbian state federation. Serbian politicians of every political stripe still maintain Serbia's claim to Kosovo and the illusion of a possible re-integration even today; the Serbian Orthodox Church encourages this as well.

Serbia's actions in the early 1990s and its attitude up to 2000 weighed on its relationship not only with the other successor states of Yugoslavia but also with the international community as a whole. In fact the European Union rushed to the aid of Belgrade following Milošević's removal in 2000. With its Stability Pact for South East Europe it created an instrument for strengthening Serbia's connection to the rest of Europe. However, the nationalistic forces that dominate the spectrum of political parties in Serbia, the tepid willingness of the country to cooperate with the Hague War Crimes Tribunal, and its rigid attitude in the Kosovo question have thus far been obstacles to rapprochement. The orientation toward Russia, which has in fact always supported Belgrade on the Kosovo-question, is seen by some political forces as a more favorable option, but in the long run is not a viable alternative to European integration.

### ***The attempt of the international community to stem the conflicts in South East Europe (Fig. 2)***

In the latter phase of the Bosnia war (1995) and the Kosovo-conflict (1999), NATO founding member Italy served as a military NATO base. NATO bombers flew combat missions from Italian airfields Aviano, Cervia and Gioia del Colle against targets in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. These combat missions decided the conflict in both cases. Consequently the Bosniaks and Croatian groups won the upper hand over the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and recaptured western Bosnia. The military turn of the tide in Bosnia was also a condition for the successful liberation action in Croatia in the Serbian occupied regions of Western Slavonia (May 1995) and on



Fig. 2: NATO membership and crisis regions in South East Europe  
Source: own design

the borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina (August 1995). The NATO aerial bombardment of Belgrade, Novi Sad and other Serbian cities forced Milošević to surrender in the Kosovo conflict.

The deployment of a relatively small UN-force in Macedonia from 1992 to 1999 probably caused Belgrade to accept the independence of Macedonia without military resistance. It may also have helped to deter the Kosovar underground army UÇK until 2000 from operations in Albanian areas in Macedonia.

The NATO-expansion of 1999 to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary supplied the Western military alliance direct land access to Serbia for the first time and particularly through the membership of Hungary, another potential base of operations. However Hungary did not tolerate any direct NATO actions in the Kosovo conflict in 1999 from Hungarian territory, out of consideration for its large ethnic minority in the Serbian Vojvodina.

The NATO expansion in 2004 to Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria (as well as around Slovakia and the Baltic regions) resulted in complete encirclement of the Balkan crisis region (Greece and Turkey have been members of NATO since

1952). Since January 1, 2007 this region has also been surrounded by the EU-states. That the relatively less developed countries Romania and Bulgaria could join the EU so early in the transformation process, can also be seen as part of the containment strategy.

With NATO acceptance of Croatia and Albania, which had already been members of the NATO Partnership for Peace program at the Bucharest summit (April 2-5, 2008) the circle was once again drawn tighter around the conflict regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia/Kosovo. The only thing preventing Macedonia from becoming part of this circle was the name controversy with Greece.

NATO expansion from 1999 to 2008 and beyond, which deployed UN, NATO and EU troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Kosovo and also Macedonia ensured the complete containment of the threat of military-led violent conflicts in the region, but did not preclude civil violence and political instability with all its (also economic and demographical) consequences. It also severely restricted the opportunity for other powers (e.g. Russia) to actively intervene in the region.



### *Steps for the integration of South East Europe into European structures*

South East Europe represents (with the exception of Eastern Europe, meaning Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine, which as a constituent of a politically integrated Europe does not appear to come into question as yet) the largest region and most compact economic periphery of Europe. Most economic and social indicators reveal a great distance between it and the states of East Central Europe (Fig. 3).

This has been rooted in developments since the early middle ages, but can be explained mainly by the long rule of the Ottoman Empire, which hindered innovative processes and the subsequent existence of antagonistic nation states that found cooperation difficult.

The long dominance of the Ottoman Empire also caused South East Europe to differentiate itself substantially from other parts of Europe up until the present day (particularly from West, North and Central Europe) in its legal systems and the attitude of citizens towards the state and national institutions. Through centuries broad segments of the population have considered the state an occupying force, avoided cooperation with it, and secured advancement through fostering of private networks.

The significant lag in socio-economic areas, the differences in legal and political culture and not the least national antagonisms, which came to the fore in the collapse of Yugoslavia only in the most spectacular way, make grafting South East Europe onto the rest of Europe and its political and economic integration particularly difficult.

It is nevertheless undisputed in Europe that full political and economic integration into the rest of Europe and the EU should also be open to South East Europe. And there is no doubt about the European identity of this region, which generates a feeling of community with the region and the readiness for acts of solidarity with it. The violent conflicts of the 1990s have awakened the awareness of the states and citizens of Western Europe to the European responsibility for this region. Finally, it was Europe's failures in post-Yugoslav crisis management and the sobering experience that such violent conflicts could only ultimately be ended through American intervention that helped to advance political unity in



Fig. 3: Gross domestic product according to purchasing power per capita in 2004 in Central and South East Europe

Source: WIENER INSTITUT FÜR INTERNATIONALE WIRTSCHAFTSVERGLEICHE (ed.) (2007)

Europe itself and helped it to improve to a certain degree.

The energetic efforts of the EU however to introduce the states of South East Europe to the EU since early 2000, have come up against current obstacles aside from those of a more cultural-historical character already mentioned: the reluctance of Serbs, and for quite some time also the Croats to cooperate with the Hague War Crimes Tribunal; the disunity of the nations in Bosnia and Hercegovina over the common state and their position on it; the conflicts between Albanians and ethnic Macedonians in Macedonia; the longlasting uncertainties in relations

between Serbia and Montenegro, and Serbia and Kosovo; Serbia's continued attitude of defiance toward the independence of Kosovo; the internal political situation in Serbia; the Western patterns often less appropriate democratic political practice also in Albania, Bulgaria and Romania.

Its lack for the most part of such integration barriers, also its slight complexity with respect to the post-Yugoslavian problem situation, along with its role as a pioneering in the economic transformation process, gave Slovenia – actually Central European and Mediterranean, not in a cultural-spatial sense South East Eu-





Fig. 4: Status of the European Union Integration 2008 in South East Europe  
Source: own design

ropean – an integration head start which led to EU accession on May 1, 2004 (see Fig. 4). Already, Slovenia is part of the Schengen and the Euro zones. The states of Romania and Bulgaria, not directly involved in the post Yugoslavian conflicts but important as a safety cordon around the conflict areas, achieved EU membership on January 1, 2007. However, they are not included in the Schengen area and the currency union.

The EU has coined the term “West Balkans” to describe the rest of states in South East Europe. This describes the successor states to Yugoslavia with the exception of Slovenia, and Albania. Croatia, though not a part of South East Europe in a cultural spatial sense and also not carrying the historical baggage that the other states do, must nonetheless arrange itself in these terms.

In 1999, following the Kosovo conflict accompanied by the removal of Milošević in Belgrade, the EU designed the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe espe-

cially for these regions, which demanded economic and also democratic, political and legal development measures that are intended to lead to more cooperation between the affected states.

The individual states of the West Balkans have been offered completely different integration schedules. The EU signed Stabilizing and Association Agreements (SAA) with Macedonia (4/1/2004), Croatia (2/1/2005), Albania (6/12/2006), Montenegro (3/15/2007), and Serbia (4/29/2008). Negotiations began with Bosnia and Herzegovina for a SAA on 11/25/2005; its conclusion was expected by 6/16/2008. In 2005, the EU granted Croatia and Macedonia the status of a candidate country. However, while negotiations are underway with Croatia and have progressed relatively far, they have not even begun with Macedonia. In both cases an accession date has not yet been determined. The EU provides the function of protection and monitoring in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, since its “con-

trolled sovereignty”, also in Kosovo and has an administrative military presence. In fact, both states are protectorates of the European Union.

All of the West Balkan states are accession candidates according to the expressed will of the EU (European Commission 2008). The actual time of an EU accession will depend in all cases not only on the progress of respective reforms and adaptations, but also on the readiness of the EU to accept them. This readiness has dropped considerably since the accession waves of 2004 and 2007 and their subsequent difficulties. This could also affect Croatia, but its admission into the EU should be easy to cope with, due to its extensively transformed economy, its considerable economic achievements (it lies considerably over that of the EU members Bulgaria and Romania), and its small size among other conditions.

Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina offer the greatest difficulty: Serbia, particularly for its domestic instability and its wavering foreign political orientation between a European and Russian option; Bosnia-Herzegovina because it is far from stable as a state and is still bickering over the goals of its three constituent nations.

## Acute and dormant conflict regions Kosovo

Rationally considered, the independence of Kosovo in the beginning of 2008 means the end of a considerable burden for Serbia. It is rid of the worry of a national minority that both demographically grows disproportionately, and is politically less acquiescent; also of an economically weak region which was a sink for development aid even during the time of communist Yugoslavia and which it would have had to support with its own means. With the generous gesture of letting go of Kosovo to obtain its independence, Serbia could also have gained a positive footing in relation to the new state, the goodwill of the international community and great attractiveness for investors.

The political class of Serbia was apparently not in the position to make such a gesture, because it (like with few exceptions the elite of Serbs as a whole, particularly also the Serbian Orthodox Church) is imprisoned in the history burdened Serbian nationalism, which accords Kosovo a key position as the “Cra-

dle of the Serbian Nation". A change in this position is not likely in the near future.

That means prolonged strained relationships between Serbs and Albanians in the whole region, particularly between the roughly 100,000 Serbs<sup>4</sup> remaining in Kosovo and the present state nation of the Albanian Kosovars as well as in the approximate border area between Serbia and Kosovo. Under these conditions it will also be extremely difficult to integrate the Serbian majority communes of Kosovska Mitrovica/Mitrovica and Leposavić/Leposaviq from the north of Kosovo into the new state and it is possible that the Albanian majority communes of Medveđa, Bujanovac and Preševo in southern Serbia may wish to separate themselves from their hostile surroundings and join Kosovo. That could lead to new crises.

Continuing strained relations with its large neighbor Serbia and between the two national groups in Kosovo will also mean that Kosovo itself will be seriously impaired economically because the potential economic relations between the two countries cannot be exploited and Kosovo will continue to be an insecure ground for investors. That could cause the small state, even with exemplary support from the EU, to remain an economically weak zone in the long run with a high potential for social conflict and a strong tendency toward emigration.

That it would join Albania in the framework of a "Greater Albania" is not likely even under such conditions, since the Albanians in Kosovo and in Macedonia on one hand, and Albania on the other, "grew apart" during the communist period. The Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia were socialized in the relatively liberal and prosperous Yugoslavia and look down on the Albanians in the mother country who grew up under a rigid and poor communist dictatorship.

The international community and particularly the EU can probably counter this development best by continuing intensive talks with Serbia, offer it concrete support and perspectives for EU accession. This is the only way a new political elite can develop in Serbia, which places less importance on nationalist feelings and may also be able to redefine Serbian national ideas.

## Macedonia

The Ohrid Agreement, which was concluded under the aegis of the international community in August 2001 and with its pressure has since then been implemented to a great extent granted the large Albanian minority in Macedonia (census 2002: 25.2 %)<sup>5</sup> the status of a second state nation and fulfils many of their demands in the area of democratic co-determination, education and public administration. Nevertheless, the desires of some Albanians go well beyond the provisions of the Ohrid Agreement, whereby the demand to federalize the state, plays an important role. Conversely, many ethnic Macedonians found even the obligations of the Agreement as imposition.

In addition, the relationship between the two groups is strained by the substantially larger demographic dynamics of Albanians, which the ethnic Macedonians refer to as an "inner invasion". Furthermore, the Orthodox ethnic Macedonians believe that the Muslim Albanians, Turks, Roma and Torbeši groups, which make up 32.5 % (2002) of the population, form a "Muslim phalanx".

It is undeniable, however, that despite a certain political warming between Macedonians and Albanians since 2001, both groups still exist as parallel societies in daily life and hardly come into contact with one another (see also SIRONI 2005; KAHL, MAKŠUTI & RAMAJ 2006). This not only concerns language and religion, but is based on the reversal of the ruling conditions in the Macedonian region which took place twice: (1) in a country previously dominated by Christian Slavs, the Albanians that converted to Islam under the rule of the Ottoman Empire were accorded a portion of state power; (2) after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire (1912/1913) they were reduced to a discriminated minority in a Slavic state (Serbia). Ethnic Macedonians still perpetuate the image of the apostate Albanian and look down on them with a certain feeling of superiority.

It is still not likely that the Albanian Macedonians will blast the state with unreasonable demands or that they will align themselves with one of both of the Albanian neighbouring states (Albania, Kosovo), as long as their economic situation in Macedonia is much better than in Albania or in Kosovo. The desire for affiliation to Albania is also improbable for

the reasons mentioned already for Kosovo. There are, however, close relations with the Kosovar Albanians from the time of Tito's Yugoslavia, and particularly from the 1990s when Albanians set up Kosovo as a shadow state, Albanian elites retreated from Kosovo to Macedonia, and thereby cooperated closely with the Macedonian Albanians. Progress in the development of Kosovo could also awaken the desire among the Macedonian Albanians to join it. A collapse of Macedonia would have consequences that are difficult to predict for the rest of the region.

## Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Dayton Accord, which came about under the American and European aegis in December 1995, did not remove or erase the ethnic segregation caused by war, "ethnic cleansing", and refugees in the once ethnically mixed Bosnia-Herzegovina, but instead consolidated it. In separating the state along to nationalist lines into Serbian and Bosniak-Croat constituent states (called "entities") and furthermore by delimiting 10 cantons in the Bosniak-Croat constituent state (Fig. 5) according to national criteria, it divided the whole state in a completely nationalist fashion. What was evidently unavoidable in order to achieve a truce, has proven as the basis for the functioning of the state to be a heavy burden.

Since the strongest competencies rest with the constituent states and (in the Bosniak-Croat constituent state) cantons, and the whole state can only act, when all three constituent nations (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats) agree, it is no wonder that Bosnia-Herzegovina has not become cohesive – neither politically nor economically.

Aside from the international community, which has served as protector and monitor since 1995, only the Bosniak majority population (2004/05: 50 %)<sup>6</sup> is interested in keeping the state whole.

The Serbian constituent republic gives the impression of being relatively content with its present condition as a *de facto* independent state under the mantle of the powerless Bosnian-Herzegovian total state. The Bosnian-Serbian elites have set themselves up in this constituent state and could not expect any bet-

<sup>4</sup> According to estimates by UNHCR ([www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)), KFOR ([www.nato.int/kfor](http://www.nato.int/kfor)), and OSCE

<sup>5</sup> STATISTICAL OFFICE OF REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

<sup>6</sup> Personal calculation according to estimated dates of the FEDERALNI ZAVOD ZA STATISTIKU (2004) for the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and according to the estimation of the Slovenian demographer JOSIPOVIĆ (2005) for the Serbian Republic.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina Administrative division 2008



Fig. 5: Administrative division of Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Source: JORDAN, P. & K. Kocsis et al. 2007

ter position from an affiliation with the mother country Serbia. Certain features of Bosnian-Serbian identity like the use of the Serbian language in its ijekavian variant (in contrast to the Serbian-used ekavian variant) may support this self-sufficiency. Its future attitude will certainly depend on the situation in Serbia.

The Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina make up the majority in three of the cantons of the Federation but are neither the majority in the state as a whole, nor in any one of the entities. Despite their formal equal status as one of the three constitutive nation states, they find themselves *de facto* in a double minority position. They participate in political, cultural and economic life in Bosnia-Herzegovina only in a restricted way and orient themselves mainly to Croatia (SKOČIBUŠIĆ 2005).

Under these complicated circumstances, the economic development of the country has suffered. Many young and

educated people are still emigrating. The international community is still holding strong to the total state. But it must remain weak under the Dayton framework despite some progress (establishment of a common police force) and is powerless to oppose the diverging interests of the three nations.

Once the neighboring states are politically stable and securely embedded in the European structures, there will have to be a political realignment of the present region of Bosnia and Herzegovina which could be connected to crises.

### Conclusion and future prospects: Current and possible roles of South East Europe in Europe (with special consideration to its Mediterranean components)

South East Europe will be able to quit its present role as Europe's periphery and a crisis region, close its gap between the

European standard of living, and gain its own clout as a region in Europe once its states stop thinking only of their own respective development, and instead overcome their own contradictory nationalisms and begin to work together on neighborly, intra-regional cooperation. In a small mosaic of small states like that of South East Europe there has to be a special type of acceptance of one's neighbors and cooperation with them.

The shortcoming of this respect is also evident in foreign trade, which is marginal between the states of South East Europe. But several sub-regions do have closer ties: especially Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; Serbia is economically strongly connected to Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (WIENER INSTITUT FÜR INTERNATIONALE WIRTSCHAFTSVERGLEICHE 2007). Far more intensive external trading integration exists between the whole of South East Europe and Italy, to which most exports from many countries go (Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Albania). Far behind Italy, but still prominent trading partners, are the Mediterranean countries Greece and Turkey. However, in terms of foreign investment, Italy is far behind Central and West European countries and is scarcely more strongly represented in South East Europe than Greece or Cyprus (WIENER INSTITUT FÜR INTERNATIONALE WIRTSCHAFTSVERGLEICHE 2006).

Overall, the current economic integration of South East Europe with the Mediterranean is strong. This is underscored by active legal and illegal worker migration from South East Europe especially to Italy, but also to Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey. If one considers foreign trade, foreign investments and work migration in the same way, South East Europe is oriented in about the same degree (admittedly different according to country) to both Central Europe and the Mediterranean.

By its very nature, South East Europe is in the role of a bridgehead to Southwest Asia and the Middle East (see also ZEUNE 1833, vol. 2, p. 242). Historically it fulfilled this role, particularly when it was part of the territory of great empires that stretched over both continents. This was the case in the Eastern Roman, the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires. The central regions of these three empires connecting South East Europe with Southwest Asia, lay also partly in South East Europe.



However, while Eastern Rome and Byzantium, centered in the Bosphorus, until the 12<sup>th</sup> century extended culturally and politically in both directions, radiated in the far corners of Europe, influenced European culture considerably, and in turn received impulse from the rest of Europe, this function was to a great extent lost in the later Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman Empire established itself in Europe from the beginning as a culturally and politically antagonistic power. South East Europe moved from a bridgehead of exchange in both directions to a Southwest Asian occupation in Europe – a “Turkish” or “Turkish-Greek” peninsula (DANIEL 1875, S. 26) in Europe, which scarcely maintained ties with the rest of Europe.

The retreat of the Ottoman Empire from the greater part of South East Europe (with exception of eastern Thrace, the “European Turkey”) and the creation of the Turkish state stripped it of this function as well. The nation states in the territory of the former Ottoman Empire were mostly hostile to Turkey, the homeland of the former occupier. This attitude intensified during the communist era, since South East Europe and Turkey belonged to different political systems and military blocs. The bridgehead function of South East Europe reduced itself to a minimum of economic relations and transit traffic in this time.

Following the political changes in Eastern Europe, it was revived comprehensively. This was not only due to economic and transportation relationships, but also as a consequence of the very active role that Turkey played politically, economically and culturally, particularly in the Black Sea region and in other parts of South East Europe; it was also a consequence of the Turkey’s application to become a member of the EU (accession attempt 1987, accession candidate since 1999, accession negotiations since 2005).

For Turkey and other states with Muslim majorities, the Muslim groups of South East Europe are a special pivot. Altogether about 7,650,000 Muslims lived in the former communist South East Europe (without Turkey, Greece and Cyprus) at the beginning of the 2000s; a figure arrived at partly with census data, and partly according to estimation (JORDAN & KOCISIS et al. 2007). Among the Muslim groups of South East Europe are the Muslim Albanians in Albania ac-

cording to numbers, the largest (about 2.1 million), followed by Bosniaks in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1.688 million), the Muslim Albanians in Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro (about 1.5 million), the Turks in Bulgaria (747,000), the Muslim Albanians in Macedonia (509,000), the Roma in Bulgaria (371,000), the Bosniaks, “Muslims” and Gorans in Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro (about 280,000) and the Pomakhs in Bulgaria (about 250,000). All other groups have less than 78,000 members.

All Muslims in South East Europe have been settled since the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the latest and are an inheritance of the Ottoman Empire, which was a Muslim state, under whose dominance previous Christian autochthonic groups (Albanians, Slavic Bosniaks, Pomakhs, Torbeši and Gorans) converted to Islam and to a lesser degree to which Muslim groups also immigrated (Turks, Tatars, also Roma).

However, the close connection between religion and state, which is characteristic for the Muslim states and which uses Islam in order to assert its religious rule with help of the state was lost in South East Europe with the retreat of the Ottoman realm. The upshot was a secularization of Muslim groups. Today religion hardly figures in the daily life of the Muslims – in some cases, even less so than it does for Christians. This secularized “European” Islam differentiates itself clearly from that of the recent immigration groups from Turkey or other countries in the cities of western Europe. In the streets of Sarajevo one sees fewer women with a head scarf than in many parts of Berlin or Vienna.

It is true that many Muslim groups in South East Europe like Bosnians or Pomakhs draw their specific identity from religion, but religion forms only the cultural background of their identity. It is in no case practiced by all members of the group. In no case does it imply a Muslim culture in the sense of value or code of conduct shaped by Islam in its substantial elements. For Albanians, Islam does even not have the character of a feature of national identity since many Albanians are also Orthodox or Catholics – so religion for Albanians is not binding but separating.

The Muslim groups of South East Europe maintain nevertheless special relationships to Muslim countries and receive support from them. They are

however less receptive to fundamentalist influences. Thus, fundamentalist movements have not been able to gain a foothold in the long run, even during the the Bosnian War, when the Muslim Bosniaks were dependent on financial help and arms supplies from Islamic countries – the best conditions for exercising influence.

Muslim groups are especially aware of the geopolitical bridgehead function of South East Europe to Southwest Asia in both directions and are currently substantially strengthening it.

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